



Opening Prayer for Trinity Sunday

God of wonder and mystery, energy and motion,
draw us to yourself, sweep us up into your fiery dance,
immerse us in your ever-flowing rivers of justice,
soak us with the rushing waves of your love,
fire our hearts and imaginations with your hope,
and lead us into fullness of life. **Amen**

'Starter for Ten' Discussion Question

What comes to mind when the word 'Trinity' is mentioned, and why might we find this aspect of who God is hard to grapple with?

Prayers of Thanks and Praise

You're invited to spend some time reflecting upon what you wish to give thanks for, and offer your prayers to God.

Psalm of the Week – Psalm 8 (Singing the Faith 801)

O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouths of babes and infants,
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
**what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?**

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honour.

**You have given them dominion over the works
of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.**

**O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever.
Amen

Prayers of Renewal

Let us pray:

God of relationship and overflowing love,
we've come knowing there's much in our lives
and in the life of the world
in need of your renewal and restoration,
which we bring to you now in prayer:

We bring to you those things for which we are sorry:
Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the times we've failed to love one another:
Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the burdens we carry and sorrows we bear:
Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the injustices and oppression in our world:

Restore us and heal us.

We bring to you the failings and disunity of your Church:

Restore us and heal us.

Silence is kept for a few moments...

God of transformation and hope,
you sweep us up into the movement of overflowing love,
setting us free from the past, to flourish in the future.

Thank you that you forgive, restore us, and transform us.

Amen

Reading John 16:12 – 15

Sermon

I have heard it said before that mathematics and music are cousins, and go naturally together. Because of this close connection, and as my background is in mathematics, I sometimes get asked if I am at all musical. Anybody who's ever heard me sing will know the answer to that question! While making music is, sadly, not one of my talents, I appreciate the abilities of others in this regard, and I enjoy listening to an eclectic range of music, from Abba at one end of the spectrum, through to Mozart and Bach at the other. Music at its best can touch and express our deepest emotions, and consequently can transport us beyond the mundane into that place where the transcendent God seems wonderfully and intimately close. Thinking about the mystery of our God being Three-in-One, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, steers us into similar territory. In the spirit of Abba, it offers a chance to say 'thank you for the music' of creation, and for all the harmonies made possible because of the overflowing love at the heart of God. Whilst it is sadly true that many preachers dread the challenge of exploring this territory, doing so opens up the wonder and beauty of God.

For starters, the doctrine of the Trinity, as it emerged over centuries of wrestling with the full divinity and humanity of Jesus and what the holding together of the two implies about the being and character of God, is helpful for busting some popular misconceptions about God, such as what divine power looks like. To quote Rusty Reno, "we are not overpowered by God as a sublime truth; rather, we're romanced by God as pure beauty". This pure beauty is revealed most fully and clearly through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is present to us through the Holy Spirit, and makes it possible for us to stand before the God we are therefore enabled to name as 'Abba' – Father. As the opening clause of the Lord's Prayer recalls, we can stand where Jesus stands in relation to God the Father, and so can be caught up in that dynamic movement of love that is right at God's heart. To be taken up into the divine dance is to surrender ourselves to moving in time with the rhythm of divine love and to find ourselves unable to keep our feet from tapping along to that beat of love which reverberates through all creation. However, this is not purely for our own benefit, but so that we might transform the world.

We might see something of this if we look at today's Gospel reading, which comes from the final conversation Jesus had with his friends. He was attempting to explain why he must follow the path that leads towards the cross, and that after his death, the Holy Spirit will come. We remember the latter when we celebrate Pentecost, but that is to get ahead of ourselves in the story. For now, Jesus explains he has declared to the disciples what has come to him from the Father, and that the Spirit will continue to do the same, as they are led into truths too overwhelming for them to bear in that instant. In other words, he was saying that their relationships with God would not be destroyed because of his death, but would take a new form, as they took upon themselves the mantle of continuing the work Jesus began. And he framed all this in terms of bringing life in all its fullness (John 10:10), which sounds a lot to me like transformation.

Now, I take away two things from this. Firstly, God draws us into the divine music, as the Spirit breaks open that song of everlasting love between the Father and the Son. Secondly, as a result, we're invited to join in music without an end. This makes sense, as grappling with the practical implications of the Gospel is the task of each and every generation of Christians. It is too easy to think of the doctrine of the Trinity as something abstract and so nothing to do with ordinary life. However, it is actually a profoundly practical claim, because if Jesus shows us the realities of God and the Holy Spirit enables us to make sense of them, then our calling is to share that life-giving reality with others. That means working for social justice, because when we do, we reveal the truth of God in the world. That means lovingly serving others because when we do, we reveal the love of God for the world to see. That means sharing our faith with other folks, because when we do, we reveal the way of God to our fellow travellers on the road. I do not know about you, but that strikes me as deeply practical stuff which makes it clear that to 'move to the beat' of God's divine music is to put our faith into practice.

Having said that, it is important to pause and note that this does not mean we need to have everything neatly worked out. After all, even for professional theologians, it is hard to 'explain' the Trinity without falling into a net of heresies and muddles. This should not come as a surprise, because to talk of the Trinity is to confront the hard limits of human language and imagination, as we encounter a mystery too wonderful to fully comprehend. That is something that the author(s) of Psalm Eight really understood. They describe gazing at the works of God's hands, the moon and the stars, and wondering, in the midst of it all, what are we that God cares for us?' They look at what God's made, and find themselves overwhelmed by the knowledge that the creator of heaven and earth loves them passionately. As a child, my father and I would sometimes take a blanket out into the garden and lie there gazing up at the stars, something that inspired wonder and

awe within me. Having had the chance in later life to undertake post-graduate research in physics, and following being challenged to link my faith and my science, I think I can understand where that biblical author, writing thousands of years before me, was coming from.

Atheists like Stephen Hawking have viewed this psalm as indicating incredulousness, that the creator of such a vast, complex and quirky universe would love people like us, when we are so adept at making a mess of things. However, I think that this reading misses the point pretty spectacularly. The psalmist expresses wonderment, because they have learnt from direct experience that God is indeed a God of love. The spectacular nature of the universe reflects the overflowing love at the heart of God, and God's rejoicing in the flourishing of the other. One might say that *creation's beauty* yields glimpses of *God's beauty*, and hence if we listen well, we might just hear the music of God's love resonating throughout what God has made. Yet, this talk of 'created beauty' comes with an obvious health warning attached. The danger of speaking in such ways is that we consequently ignore the corruptions and distortions of that creation, by sin and evil. While it's not very easy to hear, Monty Python's spoof version of a famous hymn does keep our creation-talk honest. Its first verse goes:

All things dull and ugly,
all creatures short and squat,
all things foul and nasty,
the Lord God made the lot!

The risks of romanticising creation are clear, but there still are things we may affirm, not least that creation testifies to God's beauty in its own ways, reflecting the freedoms and integrity of all that God made and makes, and Jesus Christ is the One in whom the consequences of sin and evil can – and will be – overcome.

So, how might our human songs and God's music fit together? Well, Jeremy Begbie is a musician and a theologian, and I think that what

he has to say is helpful here. In exploring the music of Bach, Begbie notes how Bach was especially gifted at taking a musical 'core text', and developing it in a rich variety of ways throughout the piece. For him, this mirrors how God gathers the raw materials of creation and enables them to flourish in ways appropriately reflecting their nature and their own created beauty. Their beauty naturally reflects Christ, because all creation was made through and for him. It will ultimately be enabled, by God, to fulfil all its created potential *through* its being reconciled to God, in Christ. Yet, it is still a beauty which has its own integrity. So, when human songs, and God's music, are in harmony, the former are not drowned out by the latter, but enhanced, because we as the performers are freed to play them to our very best.

The bottom line here is that, because God is Trinity and is therefore love by nature, God did not choose to create a universe because of being in some way incomplete or dissatisfied or bored. Instead, God looks to enable everything to flourish so that those songs of creation might be in harmony with God's music, and so sound their best. To return to where we began for a moment, God doesn't overwhelm or seek to overpower us, but to romance us with glimpses of the divine beauty, most clearly in Christ, as the Holy Spirit enables us to dance along to the beat of God's love. If nothing else, it shows us God has no 'hidden agenda', because we can see all this by looking at Jesus. Hence, God may be trusted as being 'for us' in the midst of changes and challenges. For me, this has proven to be especially important, because learning to put my trust in God has been very hard. Indeed, many of us will carry scars with us through life that can make it difficult to trust in God. After all, human love can be corrupted as readily as any other good gift. Our songs might not only sound discordant, but can drown out the divine music. Yet, God's Trinitarian love is deeper than anything we can throw at it. So, even when it sounds more like the still small voice than an orchestral crescendo for a season, it will still be there when all those other songs have ceased. It will ring out

into eternity, drawing all who hear it into fullness of life – a gift found in its giving away. To finish, here is one of the most beautiful poems ever set to music – *How Shall I Sing that Majesty*, by John Mason. I find this helpful as I approach the mystery of the Trinity.

How shall I sing that majesty
which angels do admire?
Let dust in dust and silence lie;
sing, sing, ye heavenly choir.
Thousands of thousands stand around
thy throne, O God most high;
ten thousand times ten thousand sound
thy praise; but who am I?

Thy brightness unto them appears,
whilst I thy footsteps trace;
a sound of God comes to my ears,
but they behold thy face.
They sing because thou art their sun;
Lord, send a beam on me;
for where heaven is but once begun
there alleluias be.

How great a being, Lord, is thine,
which doth all beings keep!
Thy knowledge is the only line
to sound so vast a deep.
Thou art a sea without a shore,
a sun without a sphere;
thy time is now and evermore,
thy place is everywhere.

Thanks be to God, then, for the music of the Kingdom. Amen

Recommended Resource of the Week

Nicholas Lash's *Believing Three Ways in One God* (2003) is one of the best expositions of the doctrine of the Trinity available.

Prayers of Intercession

God of overflowing love, Three-in-One and One-in-Three, we bring to you our prayers for the world you create:

We light a candle as we pray:

For the dark places of your world,
where light and love are in short supply:

hear us, we pray.

We place a stone into water as we pray:

For all those seeking renewal and refreshment,
in a world blighted by pandemics of disease and inequality:

hear us, we pray.

We hold a cross in our hands as we pray:

For those people who suffer for what is right,
when injustice, hatred, dishonesty and division seem to rule:

hear us, we pray.

We rub earth/soil through our fingers as we pray:

For the planet you sustain and which we share,
in the face of the climate emergency and bad stewardship:

hear us, we pray.

We break apart a slice/piece of bread as we pray:

For those in need of nourishment and sustenance,
where hunger for food and for you is rife:

hear us, we pray.

God of overflowing love, Three-in-One and One-in-Three,
we hold before you the people we are worried about today,
in the quiet and stillness of this time...

Lord's Prayer

Final Prayer – Collect for Trinity Sunday

Father God, you have created all things
and through Christ revealed your salvation in all the world.
Give us a vision of your glory
and by your Holy Spirit fill us with life and love
that we may praise and serve you
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. **Amen**

Blessing